# DL Barriers: Instructors and Students

*James M. Nugent*

I've nearly finished a Masters via DL (online) with a major East Coast University respected for its extensive DL programs, taken 3 courses with another University online and two with a third equally well-known, respected University online, all in the last 2 1/2 years.

My comments on barriers to DL, based on what I think is extensive personal experience, are:

Not meeting others/the professor in the class: Totally legitimate. I've made no "friendships" from online courses, and very little interaction occurred with other classmates. This is not a means to meet people; it's not going to foster bonding, and there are times when you have legitimate difficulties getting the full measure of whom you're talking to when your only true means of talking is via online postings, or, if the class calls for it (and only one in all those I've taken attempted this), via online chats. You will feel a sense of distance and you will not have the full measure of those you deal with in an online course. Interestingly enough I've subsequently met folks with whom I shared one or more online courses in an in-class course and there was little sense of my "knowing" them. Was this important to me? No, not really. School, for me, is to assist in my professional goals and interests, as well as affording me the chance to do school in the midst of a busy work schedule so the asynchronicity was important to me. It was not intended to be a social experience. Did it occasionally get lonely? You bet.

As for the teacher, I had no sense whatsoever of the instructor in nearly 70% of the courses. They (the teachers) were not very interactive, they were not very engaged in the discussions, and all too often I had the sense that all they really did was post lectures online and grade the term papers when they were due. I'm not sure why I saw this trend, was it overwork, laziness or uncertainty in how to deal with the medium? I don't know, but there is a problem there.

As for employers, I think there's a definite prejudice against online learning that's still out there, but that's also true within academia. I think that more and more companies are moving in this direction for training and as DL becomes a larger

part of the average businesses repertoire of learning that the negative stigma associated with DL education will evaporate.

Not to say that there aren't benefits that make the whole thing worthwhile. I'd focus on:

Asynchronous learning is a huge advantage for adult learners and for non-adults who are otherwise caught up in day-to-day life.

Done well, DL can be an incredibly rich experience. The amount of content out there is exploding and what I'm finding in courses now is far more than in the past, at least in terms of interactive content, visual and audio presentations, and interfacing with online sites that provide interesting and challenging learning experiences.

The opportunities to fine tune learning to individual needs, while in its infancy at this point, is incredibly exciting and worth the current investments we're making in this area.

**About the Author:**

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